

# An Act Establishing the Municipal Reforestation Program

Senator Cynthia Creem ([S.504](#)) & Representative Lori Ehrlich ([H.905](#))

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Urban forests can mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, including increased rainfall, excessive heat, and air pollution. This bill requires that each municipality in the Commonwealth have a municipal reforestation plan that the Commonwealth will finance and support with technical assistance. It also has built-in flexibility so that each community can develop a plan that meets its individual needs.



## Why we need this bill:

- The Commonwealth's urban tree canopy cover on public and private land is decreasing.
- Urban trees have been dying for many reasons - gas leaks, air pollution, road salt, drought, soil compaction, and development.
- Communities with the sparsest tree canopy cover are often low-income communities.
- Residents from low-income urban communities are disproportionately affected by excessive heat and poor air quality.
- Healthy tree canopies foster healthy communities.

## Trees provide valuable ecosystem services that:

- Create shade in the summer, mitigating the heat island effect by lowering temperatures by ten degrees on average, and reducing air conditioning costs.
- Filter the air, removing particulate pollutants that cause respiratory diseases.
- Sequester carbon dioxide above and below ground.
- Reduce stormwater runoff, avoiding flooding and reducing water pollution.
- Reduce soil erosion and remediate soil.
- Provide habitat for urban wildlife, including birds, insects, and pollinators.
- Calm traffic, creating more livable streets.
- Are associated with lower crime rates.
- Improve physical and mental health outcomes of the people who live near them.

## Key Components of the Municipal Reforestation Program

- **Establishes an Urban Forest Advisory Council under the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) that:**
  - Includes members with expertise in urban forestry, arboriculture, landscape architecture, green infrastructure, demand-side energy efficiency management, and climate change resilience and mitigation.
  - Provides advice and technical assistance to municipalities, tree-planting organizations, municipal arborists, state foresters, gas and electric companies.
- **Requires that each municipality develop a reforestation plan that includes:**
  - Inventory of the existing tree canopy cover using scientific best practices.
  - Location of optimal sites for planting trees to achieve the goals of the program.<sup>1</sup>
  - Analysis of current condition of the tree canopy cover in project sites.
  - Lists the benefits of expanding the tree canopy cover for climate mitigation such as energy consumption, heat island effect, and stormwater reduction.
  - Plans for long-term maintenance and follow-up care.
  - Plans for community engagement in planting and maintaining trees, including workforce development programs.
  - Other provisions developed by the Urban Forest Advisory Council.
- **Prioritizes environmental justice communities and municipalities that give:**
  - Priority to sites with less than 20 percent tree canopy cover, neighborhoods with high levels of particulate pollutants that affect human health, environmental justice neighborhoods and sites that are deemed to be heat islands.
  - Second priority to sites with less than 40 percent tree canopy cover.
  - Third priority to sites with less than 60 percent canopy cover.
- **Funding:**
  - Funding for the Program from the Transportation Climate Initiative, as determined by the Secretaries of EEA and DOT.
  - Funds to be distributed to municipalities 3 years after the enactment of the bill.
  - Funds based on a formula that includes percent of tree canopy cover, environmental justice neighborhoods, road mileage, and population.

Prepared by the [Gas Leaks Allies](#).<sup>2</sup> For more information: [gasleaksallies@gmail.com](mailto:gasleaksallies@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> The USDA Forest Service has Urban Tree Canopy Assessment tools to help communities determine where to plant trees for the desired benefit. <https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/urban/utc/>. The app i-Trees developed by the USDA and others provides information on where to site trees for maximum benefit. <https://www.itreetools.org/>

<sup>2</sup> GAS LEAKS ALLIES: Arise for Social Justice, Boston Climate Action Network, Boston Park Advocates, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, Clean Water Action, Climate Action Now–Western Mass., Climate Code Blue, Climate Finance Action, Climate Reality Project-MA Chapter, Community Labor United, Conservation Law Foundation, Emerald Necklace Conservancy, Friends of the Public Garden, Garden Club of the Back Bay, Gas Safety Inc., Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility, Green Committee-Neighborhood Association of Back Bay, HEET, Longmeadow Pipeline Awareness Group, Mothers Out Front, No Ashland Pipeline, Salem Alliance for the Environment, Sierra Club-MA Chapter, Speak for the Trees, Springfield Climate Justice Coalition, Twodegrees@greenneighbors.earth, 350MA, Dr. Margaret Cherne-Hendrick of Fresh Energy, Prof. Nathan Phillips of Boston University.

<sup>2</sup>Photo courtesy: <https://news.delaware.gov/2020/01/13/2020-urban-forestry-grants/>